

Opening of the Session.

OUR Session opened in Erskine Church, on the 4th inst. It was an occasion of unusual interest. The Presbytery of Montreal, under instructions of the General Assembly, inducted the Rev. John Scrimger, M. A., into the chair of Hebrew and Greek exegesis. The charge to the new Professor was delivered by the Moderator, Rev. R. Campbell, M. A., in the course of which strong testimony was borne to the personal worth, ripe scholarship, and eminent success of Mr. Scrimger as a student and pastor. He had gained high distinction in his *Alma Mater*, the University of Toronto, and he had already given abundant evidence of his skill and power as a teacher while acting for seven years as a Lecturer in the College. We publish elsewhere Professor Scrimger's able and lucid Inaugural address.

The Principal in a few appropriate words welcomed the Rev. J. W. Dey, M.A., to his office as Dean of Residence. He spoke of him as a Gold Medallist in Arts and Theology, a graduate of McGill University and of our own College. He had also valuable experience as a Teacher and Pastor.

The number of students this session will exceed the accommodation provided, notwithstanding the large addition furnished in the David Morrice Hall, and therefore the Principal looked for still more room and called for endowments for all the chairs now founded and others to be established. Who can tell what may be announced in this respect at the public opening of the "Morrice Hall" which is to take place shortly. We have just now heard of a legacy endowing another Scholarship, but the name is not yet to be divulged. We are always glad of such incidents, but confess a preference for the way adopted by Mr. Morrice, Mr. E. Mackay, and others of our liberal benefactors, who do their generous deeds and let their light shine before men in their life time.

AFTER the induction of the new professor, the Rev. Principal Macvicar addressed the large and attentive audience concerning the present condition of the college. The Principal alluded to its increasing prosperity, and the large influx of new students, but refrained from an extended speech, pending the opening of the magnificent "Morrice Hall." The Rev. Professor Scrimger then delivered the opening address of the Session on "The Prophets and their Work." This difficult and interesting subject was handled with extreme tact and ability. We have much pleasure in submitting the lecture in full to the readers of the JOURNAL:—

THE PROPHETS AND THEIR WORK.

A LECTURE DELIVERED BY REV. PROFESSOR SCRINGER AT THE OPENING OF THE SESSION, 1882-3, OF THE PRESBYTERIAN COLLEGE, MONTREAL.

To most readers of the Old Testament Scriptures, the prophetic books, which form about one fourth of the whole, are very largely unintelligible with the exception of a few portions which rightly or wrongly have come to be regarded as Messianic, and which the pious

instinct of the Church has seized upon for purposes of edification, they are practically given up as hopelessly obscure, and consequently they receive far less attention than they deserve both from ministers and people. The causes of this obscurity are not very far to seek. In the first place they are naturally more or less obscure because of their poetic structure and form; and the highest poetry is always obscure. Neither Shakespeare nor Goethe will yield up their meaning to the idle reader, who merely seeks to while away a vacant hour in their perusal. Nor will the prophets of the Old Testament. They must be studied and that carefully, or they will continue to be the despair of the pious in the Church. Unfortunately the difficulty of studying them has been very greatly aggravated hitherto by the defects of our English version, which is perhaps less satisfactory here than in any other portion of the Bible. It is to be hoped that when the revised version of the Old Testament appears, matters will be considerably improved in this respect. Another cause of obscurity is to be found in the fact that these books are not arranged in chronological order, hence they are apt to be utterly dislocated from the historical circumstances that gave rise to them. The motive that prompted them is ignored, and they are read in an utterly false light. This defect of arrangement is one which we have inherited from the Hebrew Canon, and probably will never be set right in any version intended for common use. Indeed we are not yet in a position to set it right in every case. Much of the critical discussion of these books turns upon this very question of their date and historical occasion. Many points must be admitted to be still doubtful, and until they are set at rest, it would hardly be wise to disturb an arrangement that has become venerable from its great antiquity. But it would be well if some means could be devised for fixing in the popular mind of the Church something like an approximate idea of the chronological order of these prophetic books and of bringing them into clearer relation to the parallel history. Until this is done, there is never likely to be any higher degree of intelligent appreciation of them than that which now unfortunately prevails.

Underlying this ignorance of the historical setting of prophecy, there is, however, another cause for difficulty, viz: a common misapprehension of the position which was filled by the prophets in the Jewish Church, and of the work which they were sent to perform. There is a mistake as to their objects, and as to their point of view which naturally prevents from seeing their work in its true relations, and appreciating its true value. The common idea current among the mass of Christian people is that the great distinctive feature of these men was their power to predict the future, that their chief work was foretelling the course of events in Israel and surrounding nations, especially the coming of the Messiah, and that the chief value of their writings is in furnishing an argument for the inspiration of the Scriptures, and for the truth of the Christian religion. Prophecy, in the popular mind, is simply synonymous with prediction, and as the time for the fulfilment of all, or nearly all, the predictions has long since passed by, almost the only interest taken in them is to show that they have been accurately fulfilled. Now there can be no doubt that there is an element of truth in this popular view. The books of the prophets do contain predictions, and many of them. They do furnish an argument for the inspiration of Scripture, as many of them are of such a kind as to show a supernatural origin, and they do help to prove the truth of Christianity. But while they providentially serve this purpose for us it is quite evident that this cannot have been their own idea of their work or the object they had in view. To represent them to ourselves in this way is to change their front and marshal them against an enemy quite different from the one they were actually sent to meet. And the question still remains, what were these predictions meant for, and what place did they have in their real work? We must try and put ourselves as far as possible in their place, and see their work as they saw it themselves.

The simplest way to do this is perhaps to look into the origin and history of the order. That they did constitute a separate order and fill an office which was pretty well understood, though perhaps never very clearly defined, is tolerably clear from the many allusions to them in the historical books. It is true the inspired prophets, as we count them, number only some sixteen, and as these extend over a period of about 450 years, it might seem as though there could hardly be more than one at a time in either Judah or Israel, and that they would therefore stand isolated and alone, solitary figures in society, distinguished from others only by the fact that they received revelations from heaven, and bound to each other only by the fact that they spoke in God's name and delivered somewhat unwelcome messages to men. But in reality these inspired prophets were only selected individuals out of a large number of men who held the same office and went by the same name. Frequent allusions are made to them as forming a numerous body. Some idea of their number may be gained from the statements that when Jezebel persecuted them in Israel Obadiah hid a hundred of them from her in caves, and that a few years later Ahab had no difficulty in collecting four hundred of them together at one time. In more auspicious days their numbers would be proportionately much larger. But not only were they numerous. They seem also to have been pretty thoroughly organized and to have formed a sort of guild or fraternity, with certain well-known places as their headquarters, where they had houses in common and ate together. We find such for example at Ramah, Gilgal, Bethel and Jericho; and it is quite likely there were others. We